

Ancient Near Eastern Art in Context

Studies in Honor of Irene J. Winter by Her Students

Edited by

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DARIUS I AND THE HEROES OF AKKAD: AFFECT AND AGENCY IN THE BISITUN RELIEF¹

Marian H. Feldman

Irene Winter's innovative thinking on so many aspects of Near Eastern art has inspired all fortunate to have studied with her. For me, her expansion of the concept of "style" to embrace affect and agency has provided particularly fertile grounds. Because style must exist in order to give content visible form and thus no discrete boundary can separate style from subject matter, style can encompass more than an unconscious reflection of cultural or personal ethos. Style can also be intentionally deployed for purposes of meaning and response. Winter has addressed this connotative and rhetorical aspect of style, what she characterizes as "affective" in its ability to generate emotional responses, in relation to one of Mesopotamia's most famous monuments: the victory stele of Naram-Sin (c. 2250 BCE). In a reconsideration of this monument, Winter (1996) has pursued the affective qualities conveyed in the overwhelmingly physical rendering of Naram-Sin's body, suggesting that the newly divinized ruler strategically deployed stylistic forms associated with a heroic ideal, which was literally embodied in Naram-Sin's perfectly formed and alluring figure. As a tribute to Irene, I would like to explore the concept of "style-as-meaning" in the case of a much later work, the relief of Darius I (522-486 BCE) at Bisitun in western Iran, which will lead me back, ultimately, to Naram-Sin's alluring body.

The Bisitun relief, executed at a critical juncture during Darius' consolidation of power, stands apart from other large-scale, royal Achaemenid monuments in its representation of military triumph and its extensive textual recounting of historical events. Despite its unusual content, the monument has been taken to signal the beginning

¹ As is fitting for a tribute from a student to her teacher, this paper owes much to my own students at the University of California, Berkeley. In particular, I would like to thank Shane Black, Catherine Demos, Sabrina Maras, Meliza Orantes, Jennifer Wister and my research assistant Jean Li. In addition, colleagues David Stronach, Ann Shafer and Stephanie Reed have contributed critical feedback.

of the classical Achaemenid style that finds its fullest expression at Persepolis. Indeed, most scholarship on the Bisitun relief divorces the content from the style. And because Achaemenid art seems to appear abruptly, fully formed with few indigenous precedents, scholars tend to concentrate on disentangling the diverse influences that led to its genesis. Thus, the relief's subject matter of victorious triumph has been associated with a Mesopotamian iconographic tradition, traceable from Assyria and a series of western Iranian rock reliefs back to Naram-Sin's stele. Many of the stylistic elements of Darius' anatomy and clothing, however, have been attributed instead to Greek influences (Boardman 2000, 104-11; Curtis 2005, 117; Farkas 1974, 29-37; Frankfort 1946, 6-14; Luschey 1968, 63-94; Richter 1946, 15-30; contra: Nylander 1970, 121-38; Root 1979, 182-226). In such studies, "style" has been understood solely as an aspect of form, useful primarily for comparative ends in order to trace the mixed ingredients that comprised Achaemenid art. "Meaning," on the other hand, has been derived from a narrowly defined concept of iconography that focuses only on motif. In this way, it has been easy to identify "Greek style" existing in an otherwise Near Eastern iconography without worrying about the implications of this coexistence. If, however, we consider style as a carrier of meaning, then this dichotomy should be reexamined, asking not only whence does the style derive, but what associative connotations might it have held for Darius, his court and his subjects. As Winter (1998, 72) has pointed out, "the key to 'style-as-meaning' lies. . . in cultural context and in the emotional response invoked/provoked by the work." Considered in this light, I would like to propose that the style of the Akkadian empire, exemplified by Naram-Sin's stele and connoting a semi-divine heroic, might have been deployed by Darius in his Bisitun relief as a way to link himself to the great Mesopotamian empire of the past.

The Bisitun (or Behistun) relief, carved into the living rock of the Zagros mountains, rises approximately 100 meters above a highway leading from central Mesopotamia (Babylon) to the Iranian plateau and the Median capital of Ecbatana (Hamadan) (figure 1).² Carved early in the reign of Darius I, probably before 519/518 BCE, it is

² The monument measures approximately 7 m high by 18 m wide (sculpted area: approx. 3 m high by 5.5 m wide); Stronach and Zournatzi (1997, 330-31) for general references.

unique among Achaemenid monumental works of art. The monument consists of a trilingual inscription in Elamite, Babylonian Akkadian, and Old Persian that frames a roughly rectangular-shaped sculpted representation depicting Darius triumphant. Both text and image work together to express Darius' legitimacy and divine favor. The text recounts the complicated story of Darius' succession to Cambyses as king of Persia (Schmitt 1991). According to the inscription, before leaving to campaign in Egypt, Cambyses secretly murdered his brother, Bardiya, whereupon another character, Gaumata, stepped in and impersonated Bardiya. After Cambyses died far from Persia, Darius claims that he killed the imposter and assumed the throne. A series of revolts ensued, which Darius put down over the course of the first few years of his rule. General consensus now interprets this narrative as justification for what appears to be Darius' murder of the legitimate successor to the throne (Kuhrt 1995, 655). The image at Bisitun presents an encapsulation of Darius' dispatch of Gaumata and quelling the revolts, and reaffirms the divine sanction of his actions. Slightly off center to the left, Darius with a bow in one hand stands with his left foot planted squarely on the prone body of Gaumata who raises his hands in supplication and kicks up one foot as if in anguish. Before Darius stand nine rebels, connected to one another by shackles and with their hands tied behind them. Each is identified by a trilingual label and distinguished by clothing and hairstyle. Two armed attendants follow Darius, one holding an upright spear, the other a bow and quiver. In the center of the relief, over the bound rebels, hovers the torso of a male figure rising out of a winged disc. Wearing a horned headdress that in Mesopotamia signals divinity, the entity faces Darius, raising its right hand while holding a ring in its left hand.³

As an illegitimate ruler, Darius, following in the tradition of great usurpers of the past, took pains to stress his divine selection, ascribing his rule to the favor of Ahuramazda. He also carefully controlled his royal persona both through texts, such as the Bisitun inscription, and images. In the Bisitun text, Darius claims to have sent copies of it throughout his empire, and preserved examples survive from Elephantine (Aramaic text) and Babylonia (both text and image) (Greenfield

³ The relief was carved in several stages that included later additions of the right-most captive, the Akkadian text and the Old Persian text (Hyuse 1999, 45-66).

and Porten 1982; Seidl 1976, 1999a, 1999b). The homogeneity of royal representations during the reign of Darius attests to the strict control over their production, while the persistence of the canonical repertoire through his successors' reigns provides a good measure of their effectiveness.

The Bisitun relief supplies one of the only historical accounts from the Achaemenid empire and is the only monumental rendering of domination.⁴ Nowhere else is such a blatant image of royal physical triumph put forth at such large scale in the public sphere. The extensive narrative of court intrigue and rebel insurrections represents the only such document, monumental or otherwise, known from Achaemenid sources. While the impetus for such a monument—that is, Darius' desire to legitimize his rule—seems reasonably settled, a quest for its artistic precedents has dominated scholarly inquiries.

Since the early twentieth century, scholars have traced the inspiration for Bisitun to a series of carved rock reliefs in the vicinity that date to the end of the third and beginning of the second millennium and that display both thematic and compositional similarities with Bisitun (Hrouda 1976; Börker-Klähn 1982, nos. 29-34).⁵ The best preserved example, found at Zohab near Sar-i Pul approximately 100 kilometers to the west of Bisitun, retains an inscription of a local Lullubi ruler, Annubanini (Börker-Klähn 1982, no. 31) (figure 2). It depicts the armed ruler stepping upon the fallen body of his enemy, while to his right, Ishtar extends a ring in her right hand and secures in her left the bonds of two naked kneeling captives. A star or sun symbol occupies the space between Annubanini and Ishtar. Below the main scene, to the left of the inscription, six more bound and naked captives move to the right.

The geographical proximity to Bisitun of these rock reliefs strengthens the argument that Darius adopted from them the concept of a victory monument carved in the living rock. Moreover, the rock reliefs form a discrete local tradition, which suggests that Darius intentionally drew upon the form and content of the earlier reliefs in their indigenous setting. He may have considered them Elamite or perhaps Median, and thus sought to ally himself to these earlier Iranian

⁴ For such scenes on seals, see Boardman 2000, 158-59.

⁵ In particular, six reliefs (four at Sar-i Pul, one near Darband-i Sheikan and one at Darband-i Gawr) show much the same scene, though with variations.

kingdoms through the use of a peculiarly western Iranian tradition (Root 1979, 195). The Bisitun monument, however, is by no means a copy of these reliefs. Certain details may be associated with one or another, for example the bound captives or the poses of the defeated enemy. Nonetheless, variations occur at Bisitun that indicate that no one rock relief, nor even the group as a whole, supplied the entirety of either formal or stylistic elements.

The early rock reliefs have, in turn, been associated with the stele of Naram-Sin, the best known example of the motif of a victorious ruler stepping upon his vanquished enemy. The triumphant pose and overall conception of the rock reliefs are closely related to the stele, which commemorates the Akkadian ruler's victory over mountain peoples of this very region, including the Lullubi. The stele has been studied and described so often that only a cursory overview is given here (figure 3).⁶ At the apex stands Naram-Sin, wearing a horned headdress and holding a bow and axe in one hand and a mace or arrow in his other. With his left foot he steps upon two apparently dead enemies. At least three rows of soldiers scale the mountain below him to the left, while pleading or dead enemy occupy the space to the right. Three celestial symbols fill the uppermost part of the relief. In an intriguing turnabout, the very people debased by Naram-Sin in his stele—the Lullubi—later appropriated his visual formula for their own purposes in the Zagros rock reliefs, hinting at the range of “affect” such a scene could carry.⁷ However, Margaret Cool Root is certainly correct to treat with caution any strictly linear developmental sequence beginning with Naram-Sin, through the Zagros rock reliefs to Bisitun (Root 1979, 199). As none are direct copies of any preceding ones, it is more fruitful to consider multiple interacting trends within the Mesopotamian and western Iranian traditions as contributors to Darius' relief, and under the rubric of “trends” I would include “style.”

Specific motival details at Bisitun have been associated with Neo-Assyrian and, less frequently, Neo-Babylonian precedents (Sarre and Herzfeld 1910, 189-98; Luschey 1968, 84-90; Farkas 1974, 32; Root 1979, 202-18). For example, the squared beard and hairstyle of Darius,

⁶ See below for further discussion and references.

⁷ The dates of the rock reliefs are debated, but they almost certainly post-date Naram-Sin (Börker-Klähn 1982, 137).

which are quite different from later renderings at Persepolis, have been compared to those of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh. The torso extending from the winged disc has often been linked to the ninth century reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, although examples in Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals that continue into the seventh century offer perhaps better comparisons (Luschey 1968, 85; Collon 2001, 79-82). Herzfeld is one of the few to draw on Neo-Babylonian comparisons, for example the boundary stone of Marduk-apla-iddina II (c. 715 BCE), which he uses as comparanda for the rounded curls at the back of Darius' neck (Sarre and Herzfeld 1910, 195) (figure 4). As with the rock reliefs and Naram-Sin's stele, no one Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian extant work provides a precise model; Ashurbanipal's hair forms a square bunch at the nape of his neck that looks altogether different from Darius' softly rounded clump of curls, as noted by Herzfeld.

Probably the most debated and discussed issue regarding precedents, however, relates to the style of the Bisitun relief, especially the rendering of Darius' figure and clothing, and the extent to which Greek arts of the late sixth century contributed to Achaemenid sculpture. Two features in particular have occupied the center of this discussion: the execution of the drapery of Darius' robe and the profile shoulder (figure 5). It is important to note that the discussion has been complicated by issues surrounding the chronology of art production from Cyrus to Darius, the resulting stylistic development derived from this chronology, and considerations regarding the role of the Bisitun relief within the development of Achaemenid sculpture as a whole. The crux of the problem lies in the dating of the reliefs of Palace P at Pasargadae, which originally were considered part of Cyrus' oeuvre, but now have been placed convincingly well into the reign of Darius, after the Bisitun relief and just prior to Persepolis (Stronach 1978, 95-99). This chronological sequence rests partly on the redating of the "Cyrus inscription" from Pasargadae to the reign of Darius (Stronach 1978, 100-101; 1997a, 48-49 with n. 11), but principally on an accepted evolutionary development of the rendering of pleats and folds in the drapery of the Achaemenid court robe. Attributing the Palace P reliefs to Darius and consequently assigning the introduction of the Achaemenid robe to his reign, places the Bisitun rendering at the very beginning of the sequence. Within this debate is a related issue, that of comparing Bisitun to Greek examples in contrast to comparing the Pasargadae Palace P reliefs or Persepolis reliefs to Greek

examples. The drapery and plasticity evident at Bisitun is markedly different from that at Palace P and Persepolis in a way that does not seem due to differences in scale or location, as a number of scholars have remarked (Luschey 1968, 88; Farkas 1974, 32-33). Most notable is the lightness in rendering the drapery of the Achaemenid robe at Bisitun in such a way that the material stretches thinly across the back leg and buttocks, revealing the well defined musculature swelling beneath it, especially evident in the figure of Darius whose stance accentuates the tautness of his skirt. This is in contrast to the sharply edged geometric stylizations of the zig-zagging pleats and deeply cut precision of the symmetrically arranged folds seen in the later robes (compare to Farkas 1974, 84).

Several scholars maintain that the drapery and true profile stance can only be explained through Greek influences, best illustrated on the reliefs of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi dated to around 525 BCE (figure 6). For Luschey (1968, 86-90) and Farkas (1974, 32-37, 83-115), this translates into the presence of Greek sculptors who executed the Bisitun relief. Boardman (2000, 110, 125), however, sees clear Greek precedence but little to convince him of actual Greek sculptors. This opinion echoes Nylander (1970, 138), who in his discussion of the Palace P reliefs from Pasargadae states that "the form and style of the draped figures are profoundly un-Greek," and thus he considers it unlikely that any Greeks actually performed sculptural tasks. One can in fact make arguments against many of the purportedly Greek elements—the plasticity of the bodies and the use of a true profile shoulder—which find precedents in Near Eastern arts of the Late and Neo-Babylonian periods, such as the steles of Nabonidus (555-539 BCE) or the boundary stone of Marduk-apla-iddina II (c. 715 BCE; Nylander 1970, 128-32; Root 1979, 215-16; Börker-Klähn 1982, nos. 263, 264, 266; Calmeyer 1994, 137) (figure 4). However, there is no need to deny Greek models for the omega-shaped pleats and zig-zagging sleeve edges seen in the Achaemenid robes of the canonical imperial style established by Darius. Rather, I maintain that they are not the sole prototype for the particular rendering of drapery seen at Bisitun.

In all these discussions, with the notable exception of Margaret Cool Root, the investigation of the style of drapery and plasticity has unfolded apart from any consideration of meaning. Yet, following Winter (1998, 56 with n. 3), style is both complementary to and generative

of messages provided by content. In addition, we must acknowledge the element of agency in the manipulation and organization of form, form being the materialization of content. We can turn to Root's scholarship on Achaemenid art for an initial exploration into affect and agency at Bisitun. In her discussion, Root (1979, 191) argues that the *idea* of the relief guided the selection of images with an interest in creating "a series of calculated allusions to antique traditions." With regard to the use of Assyrian elements, for example the divine winged disc, she claims that this was not due simply to the fortuitous survival of Assyrian sculptors or to any peculiarly tenacious nature of the Assyrian art tradition, but rather to Darius' strategic attempt to imbue the monument with "associations with archetypal power" (Root 1979, 213). In a radical departure from traditional scholarship, she includes style among those aspects of conscious selection, noting that style can impose nuances of feeling or meaning, which in turn can be manipulated to produce desired effects (Root 1979, 214). In other words, Root is getting at the affective properties of style and their potential to serve as a vehicle of meaning, effectively restoring agency to the person of Darius. I might add that this scenario of strategic stylistic deployment does not exclude the possibility that Greek sculptural skills were tapped in order to achieve it, either directly through Ionian sculptors brought from western Anatolia or by Persian sculptors who were sent there in order to learn these techniques. And in fact, it fits well with the notion that Darius not only conveyed his message of conquest and incorporation through the depiction of elements from the various cultural units of his empire, but also through the actual process of production and labor similar to that detailed in the "Foundation Charter" that describes the building of Darius' palace at Susa with manpower and materials from throughout the Persian realm.⁸

Yet if we see meaning in style, what exactly was the specific style of Darius' figure at Bisitun trying to say? Though she focuses primarily on Assyria, Root's argument (1979, 213-24) that specific traditions were meaningful to the Achaemenids encourages us to examine more

⁸ DSf exists in several versions in Old Persian, Elamite and Akkadian and dates to early in the reign of Darius. For brief discussion with references, see Harper, Aruz, and Tallon 1992, no. 190. At Persepolis, the reality of employing diverse peoples is confirmed by thousands of administrative texts from the reign of Darius (see Kuhrt 1995, 650 with references).

closely the stylistic associations evident in the figure of Darius. Rather than seeking meaningful expression through connections with Greek style, I believe we can more profitably look back in time to the stele of Naram-Sin and the artistic style of the Akkadian period, which carried through Old, Middle and Neo-Assyrian traditions. Despite the long temporal span between the creation of the stele and the Bisitun relief, some scholars have commented on the stylistic, in addition to the motival and compositional, similarities between them.⁹ When we focus on the figure of the ruler in the two monuments, the visual connections are especially striking (figures 5 and 7). While their different attires locate Darius and Naram-Sin within their respective cultural and temporal spheres, the rendering of the drapery and the articulation of the back leg and buttocks display remarkable affinity. In the case of Naram-Sin, the definition of his legs appears so forcefully that the tightly wrapped skirt practically recedes from view. His garment is tied in a loose knot on his hip, from which radiate softly undulating folds analogous to those on either side of the lower part of Darius' robe.

The stele of Naram-Sin has been the subject of numerous studies, including several by Irene Winter (1996, 1999, 2002, 2004; also, Börker-Klähn 1982, no. 26; Harper, Aruz, and Tallon 1992, no. 109). For the most part, these studies have examined the monument within what could be considered its original and intended context, that is, as a victory stele made under the patronage of Naram-Sin as the king of Akkad during the twenty-third century BCE. Situating Naram-Sin's voluptuously sculpted body in the context of the language of legendary heroes such as Gilgamesh, the early ruler of Uruk, Winter (1996) argues that the *style* of sexuality and allure serves as a potent vehicle for identifying Naram-Sin with a heroic ideal. The adoption of this ideal at the time of Naram-Sin's rule, and perhaps also its lack of success in the periods immediately following, may be partly ascribed to his unprecedented act of self-divinization, which is signaled on the stele both visually by the horned headdress and linguistically by the divine determinative before his name.

⁹ Most notably, Nylander (1970, 129), who vis-à-vis the Achaemenid sculptures writes, "... it is enough to consider the stele of Naramsin, which shows a fairly high relief with a careful modelling of volumes and even an interest in the relation between body and clothes."

The physical realization of Naram-Sin's body can also be understood as a culmination or an extreme example of a trend in Akkadian art towards concreteness and actuality. Throughout the period, both large- and small-scale arts display a strongly plastic style of rendering bodies, particularly musculature, in a very concrete and volumetric manner. This includes an interest in certain kinds of materiality, most notably, that of the drapery of textiles in monumental royal statuary, and an occasional depiction of the anatomy lying beneath. The depiction of materiality is in no way comprehensive, nor does it present a "realistic" or illusionistic representation of the whole. Yet, it can be exquisite in its translation of an exceptionally tactile aspect. On two statues of Manishtushu, one of diorite the other of limestone and both excavated at Susa, the conical surface of the royal robe is broken by soft folds of drapery falling diagonally across the front of the skirt (Moortgat 1969, pls. 141, 142).¹⁰ The statue of an unidentified man, perhaps a ruler, found at Assur depicts the rounded musculature of the arm and stylized shoulder blade through a tautly stretched wrap (Harper, et al. 1995, no. 22). This concrete physicality also occurs on the small scale, best seen in cylinder seals, such as one belonging to a scribe of Shar-kali-sharri, the successor of Naram-Sin (Moortgat 1969, pl. F: 1). What this actualization of physical forms means on a widespread level during the Akkadian period is somewhat difficult to assess and would require an extensive discussion not possible in this study. I believe, however, that this visual development may be linked to what Nissen (1988, 165-97) has described as the establishment of an ideology of centralized kingship that sought to emphasize the material world in order to downplay the power of local, city-affiliated temple institutions. By concretizing the body of the ruler, the Akkadian kings sought to establish their physical presence and dominance.¹¹

But how then can I argue for a stylistic connection between two works of art made nearly two thousand years apart? Could Darius have had first-hand experience of Naram-Sin's stele? And might it (or the Akkadian style in general) have especially resonated with him because of a long-standing collective memory of the Akkadian empire? I hope to provide a qualified yes to these questions by following the

¹⁰ The limestone statue retains its base, which is decorated with the naked, dead bodies of defeated peoples, suggesting that this sculpture should be considered, at least in part, a victory monument similar to Naram-Sin's stele.

¹¹ A suggestion also made by Michalowski (1993, 87).

perambulations of Naram-Sin's stele and by tracing the revival of the Akkadian tradition in later Mesopotamian history, in particular its distinctive style of physical concreteness, and the attendant associations with its legendary empire.

We can track, to some extent, the geographic travels of the stele by means of the texts inscribed upon it and its archaeological context. The stele preserves a fragmentary three-column inscription of Naram-Sin's, located to the left of the mountain peak.¹² It reads,

DINGIR Naram-Sin, the powerful, [. . . about 10 lines missing or untranslatable. . .] in the mountains of the Lullubi assembled and a battle. . . [. . . about 15 lines missing or untranslatable. . .] dedicated to the deity . . . [about 10 lines missing]. (Gelb and Kienast 1990, 90-92; also Frayne 1993, 144)

On the empty space of the rising mountain peak, as if extending from the contorted form of a pleading enemy, flows an Elamite inscription,

I (am) Shutruk-Nahhunte, son of Hallutush-Inshushinak, beloved servant of Inshushinak, king of Anshan (and) Susa, enlarger of my realm, protector of Elam, prince of Elam. At the command of Inshushinak, I struck down Sippar. I took the stele of Naram-Sin in my hand, and I carried it off and brought it back to Elam. I set it up in dedication to my lord, Inshushinak. (König 1965, 76, no. 22)

It seems likely that the stele was originally erected in the Ebabbar temple of the sun god Shamash at Sippar. The monument apparently remained on display at Sippar, probably in the temple courtyard, for over a thousand years until the Elamite king Shutruk-Nahhunte carried it off around 1158 BCE.¹³

Reconstructing what happened to the stele once at Susa is somewhat problematic. Shutruk-Nahhunte's inscription states that he set it up in the temple of the chief Elamite god, Inshushinak. How long it remained on view after that is less clear. Unfortunately, we know little about the final deposition of Naram-Sin's stele at Susa, a situation that has led to general assumptions and inferences. The stele was discovered,

¹² The inscription has suffered damage due to the flaking properties inherent in the stone (Harper, Aruz, and Tallon 1992, 285-86).

¹³ We know from texts of the Old Babylonian period that Akkadian monuments and their inscriptions, accessible in temple courtyards, retained a powerful hold on later Mesopotamian imagination (Buccellati 1993, 58-71; Michalowski 1980, 236, 239).

along with several other Mesopotamian monuments, on the Acropole during the first two seasons of the French excavation led by Jacques de Morgan (1898 and 1899), when stratigraphic considerations were fairly rudimentary.¹⁴ Jéquier (1905, 9, 28-29), discussing the Code of Hammurabi, which was also excavated in this locale a few years later, claims the levels were too confused to be worth even attempting a stratigraphy. Another of the early archaeologists, Lampre, also acknowledged the notoriously imprecise method of recording (de Morgan 1900, 108). He notes that levels associated with Hellenistic remains ranged from one to four meters below the surface, while the Naram-Sin stele is recorded at three meters below the surface; thus, it might well have been excavated from a Hellenistic period level.

Yet, it is Ashurbanipal's sixth-century destruction of Susa, vividly portrayed in his annals, that is usually blamed for the seemingly haphazard and scattered manner in which the Mesopotamian monuments were discovered (Streck 1916, 51-61; Aynard 1957; Harper, Aruz, and Tallon 1992, cat. no. 189; Kuhrt 1995, 500). In these accounts, the Assyrian king claims to have destroyed the ziggurat of Susa, smashing its shining copper horns, appropriating its divine statues and treasuries, and burning secret groves. Complete devastation is said to have ravaged the city and province. The hyperbole of Assyrian military annals is well known,¹⁵ and Elamite texts found at Susa, which date to the time following Ashurbanipal's destruction and before the coming of Darius, attest to ongoing administrative and legal functions at the site (de Miroschedji 1985, 266; Potts 1999, 288-302, esp. 297). While Ashurbanipal's annals make reference to "the treasures of Sumer, Akkad, and Babylonia that the ancient kings of Elam had looted and brought to Elam," which appears to refer to those very monuments excavated on the Acropole, it seems unlikely that, had Ashurbanipal come upon such important monuments as the stele of Naram-Sin or the Code of Hammurabi, he would have left them to suffer his violent wrath, and indeed the text continues by

¹⁴ Mesopotamian monuments were found in trenches Morgan 7γ through 15γ (de Morgan 1900, 100-23, fig. 167; de Morgan 1905, 5-8; Harper, Aruz, and Tallon 1992, 22, 24 n. 6, 123-27, fig. 41; also see plan in de Mecquenem 1911a; reprinted in de Mecquenem 1911b).

¹⁵ See, for example, Sennacherib's recounting of the purportedly total destruction of Babylon, though we know that soon thereafter, Sennacherib's successor, Esarhaddon, began renovations in the city, and the Babylonian Chronicle states simply that the city was captured (Kuhrt 1995, 585).

recounting that he carried the treasures back to Assyria (Streck 1916, 51-52; Luckenbill 1927, 309).

Textual sources tell of other violence at Susa in the centuries after Shutruk-Nahhunte brought the stele to the site, including the celebrated triumph of Nebuchadnezzar I (1125-1104 BCE) and the upheavals of the early Hellenistic period (Harper, Aruz, and Tallon 1992, 162; Potts 1999, 252-55). Lampre reports that a Kassite period boundary stone, found in the same area as the stele, had been effaced by Hellenistic period use of the stone to polish weapons or tools, and fragments of such boundary stones turned up as fill in Hellenistic constructions (de Morgan 1900, 108). In short, given the poor state of the early excavations at Susa, the date and cause of the final deposition of Naram-Sin's stele must remain an open question.

A recently published tablet from an archive at Sippar, however, may provide circumstantial evidence supporting the continued accessibility of Naram-Sin's stele into the Achaemenid period. This tablet contains a copy of the prologue of the Code of Hammurabi and specifically notes that the copy was according to the ancient stele (*narû*) erected in Susa (Fadhil 1998; Charpin 2003). The Sippar archive contains tablets dating as late as the reign of Cambyses, and Charpin suggests that the Hammurabi stele copy, which is undated, should be placed within a chronological framework of the Achaemenid period (Frame 1984; al-Jadir 1998; Charpin 2003). Given the proximity of Hammurabi's stele to that of Naram-Sin's, it seems quite possible that both of these monuments remained on view at Susa in the period immediately prior to Darius' accession, if not later. The remains of the temple of Inshushinak lay to the east of the Mesopotamian finds, in the southeastern part of the Acropole, and evidence exists for the reuse of its bricks during the Achaemenid period, suggesting that the building was also preserved in some form during the time of Darius (Harper, Aruz, and Tallon 1992, 126; Caubet 2003, 330). In this regard, it is worth remembering that Susa played an important role early in Darius' creation of an imperial identity, perhaps in part because of its association with Elam. Darius built a large palace there, the architectural form of which signals his creative adoption of the Mesopotamian past as well as the invention of a new Achaemenid expression (Perrot 1981, 81; Boucharlat 1997, 57 with n. 1; 2001, 113-23).

Yet, even if Darius could have seen Naram-Sin's stele (presumably along with Hammurabi's), would it (and its style) have resonated with

him? Certainly within Mesopotamia the Akkadian period provided a potent mytho-historical past based on the expansionist exploits of its great rulers, in particular Sargon of Akkad (c. 2330 BCE). Central for the subsequent historical imagining of Akkad is the “firstness” of the Akkadian imperial accomplishment, in particular the unification of Sumer and Akkad and the establishment of charismatic kingship (Michalowski 1980, 70; Westenholz 1985, 1997, 1-3).¹⁶ While the stele of Naram-Sin is the best preserved and most forceful rendering of the motif of a victor stepping upon a prone enemy, other examples exist from the Akkadian period. A fragmentary stele from Tello carved on both sides in several registers, probably to be attributed to the reign of Naram-Sin’s predecessor Rimush, depicts several vignettes of military combat (Foster 1985). In contrast to the Naram-Sin stele, the prone enemies are still alive, with knees bent and arms raised in various positions of pleading, a variation seen at Bisitun in the raised right leg of the pleading Gaumata, whose foot protrudes from behind Darius. Such variations indicate that a chance encounter with Naram-Sin’s stele on the part of Darius cannot fully account for the similarities found in the Bisitun relief. Indeed, they suggest instead that Darius was actively drawing upon a long-standing tradition in which the Akkadian rulers were associated with imperial conquest itself. This tradition included Naram-Sin’s stele, but significantly, also embraced a wider field of representational and stylistic meaning.

We have already seen how the visual potency of victory created by the Akkadians found resonance among the small tribal kingdoms of the Zagros at the end of the third and beginning of the second millennium. Mesopotamian works also continued to quote both the motif and, importantly, the style of the Akkadian conquest imagery. These include the fragmentary “Mardin” stele, which probably dates to the reign of Shamshi-Adad I in the early part of the second millennium and depicts on one side an axe-wielding figure stepping upon a collapsing man (Orthmann 1975, 301, no. 182). A similar scene on a fragmentary fourteenth-century black marble lid from Assur employs a quite forceful rendering of sculptural physicality reminiscent of the bodies on Naram-Sin’s stele (Moortgat 1969, pl. 244). Both of these examples derive from the northern, Assyrian tradition,

¹⁶ In later traditions, Sargon is the glorified ruler, while Naram-Sin is seen as the cause of the empire’s demise.

which early on established mytho-historical links to the Akkadian dynasty. For example, we know that Shamshi-Adad, who controlled a large territorial state in northern Mesopotamia and Syria at the end of the nineteenth century BCE, derived his own legitimation, at least in part, from the memory of Akkad (Michalowski 1980, 86).¹⁷ Claiming a direct line of kingship from Akkad, Shamshi-Adad rebuilt a temple to Ishtar at Nineveh that had been erected originally by the Akkadian ruler Manishtushu.

Several of the kings of Assyria took the names of Sargon and Naram-Sin, beginning in the Old Assyrian period, but the best known is Sargon II of the Neo-Assyrian period (721-705 BCE) (Walker 1995, 231). Particularly relevant for this study is Sargon II's implementation in his palace decoration at Khorsabad of both thematic and stylistic quotations of the Akkadian period (Stronach 1997, 310).¹⁸ The most visible of these are two colossal heroic figures grappling with diminutive lions. The two sculptures, which stood along the courtyard façade of the throneroom, are executed in such high relief that they appear almost fully three-dimensional. Both human and lion forms exhibit extreme physicality in the plastic modeling of their musculature and the projecting planes of their various body parts. The play between the Neo-Assyrian and Akkadian periods is further invoked in the differing hairstyles of the two heroes; one wears the long spiral curls of the nude belted hero well known from Akkadian glyptic, the other sports the standard Assyrian court fashion. A similar convergence of imperial ideology and an artistic style of physicality arose during the Middle Assyrian period, seen in the new annalistic glorification of territorial expansion and the exquisite glyptic of the period often described by scholars as "astonishingly vital" in its sculptural modeling. Frankfort goes so far as to say, "the affinities of these [Middle Assyrian] seals with those of the Akkadian Period are unmistakable, but this may well be due to a similar outlook rather than to tradition" (Frankfort 1996, 142). The fascination with the early Akkadian rulers also appears in Babylonia. Offerings to a statue of Sargon were instituted

¹⁷ See also Michalowski's discussion (1980, 87) of offerings to Sargon and Naram-Sin instituted at Mari under Shamshi-Adad's rule.

¹⁸ This section also draws upon work completed in a seminar and later an unpublished 2002 senior honors thesis on Sargon II's use of the Akkadian past by Shane Black at the University of California, Berkeley.

at the Ebabbar in Sippar during Neo-Babylonian times and continued even into the early Achaemenid period.¹⁹

In addition, it seems that Elamite kings sought to legitimize their rule by drawing upon the traditions of Mesopotamia. The Middle Elamite Shutrukid dynasty achieved this through the acquisition and display of significant royal monuments like Naram-Sin's stele (Harper, Aruz, and Tallon 1992, 122). That the name of Naram-Sin held power even in twelfth-century Elam is evident in its inclusion in Shutruk-Nahhunte's inscription and in the rededication of the monument to the chief Elamite god. The appeal of the Mesopotamian royal tradition is also apparent in the reworking of an appropriated Babylonian stele, in which the recarved figure of an Elamite king replaces the preexisting Mesopotamian figure receiving the rod and ring of kingship from a seated deity (Harper, Aruz, and Tallon 1992, 122 n. 4, cat. no. 117). Elizabeth Carter suggests the responsible Elamite king was Shutruk-Nahhunte I, while Prudence Harper argues for a later date in the eighth century (Harper, Aruz, and Tallon 1992, 122 n. 4, 182). Should the later date be accepted, then an argument can be made for the continuation of both interaction by and resonance for the Neo-Elamites with Mesopotamian royal imagery. This Elamite connection with Mesopotamia might have served as a critical bridge for the Achaemenids, since it is now becoming clearer that, however we define the early Achaemenid state, its identity drew in some profound way on Elamite traditions (Alvarez-Mon 2006).

A Mesopotamian presence at Susa itself during the Akkadian period is evident in Old Akkadian tablets with Akkadian personal names found at the site, linking the city, to which nearly a thousand years later the stele of Naram-Sin would be taken, directly with the great empire (Michalowski 1993, 75-76). Regardless of whether Darius might have had access at Susa to the stele of Naram-Sin, which remains at least a strong possibility, there is indirect evidence through the appropriation of earlier Mesopotamian imperial arts and architecture for a similar incorporation of stylistic associations that ultimately goes back to the concrete materiality of the Akkadian kings. That the physicality of the body, especially the back leg and buttocks, straining through the fabric of the robe is a stylistic feature found in Achaemenid monumental art

¹⁹ CT 55: 469; CT 56: 442, 451; CT 57: 59, 117, 242, 256, 307, 312, 617 (Frame 1984, 750-51; Joannès 1992, 162; Bongenaar 1997, 209, 230 with n. 205).

only at Bisitun may be due to the uniqueness of Bisitun as the only “victory monument” in the tradition of Naram-Sin’s stele.

Given the potency of the Akkadian rulers’ heroic myth in the historical imagination of later Mesopotamia and Elam and the possibility of Naram-Sin’s stele being accessible to Darius while at Susa, we might rethink the stylistic aspects of the Bisitun relief in light of Winter’s argument for the affective properties of style. Moreover, given the care with which Darius crafted his imperial image for political and propagandistic purposes, we need to ask what purpose would be served (what affective associations sought) by the insertion of “Greek” stylistic elements into a highly charged statement of imperial control. Since the elements traditionally assigned to Greek influences (fluid drapery revealing anatomy underneath and true profile shoulders) have precedents in the arts of Mesopotamia, it seems unnecessary to look to Greece or western Anatolia, aside from the possible procurement of sculptors with the technical knowledge to execute such traits. If style can generate affect—and we know how strategic Darius was in the manipulation of his art and architecture for affective purposes—it seems that the style of the Bisitun relief, probably the most critical public monument of Darius’ early years, must also have held significance and would not have been left to the vagaries of captive Greek artists surreptitiously inserting their “native experience and imagination” (Boardman 2000, 110). With regard to possible Greek or Greek-trained artists working in Persia, perhaps what we have is a happy confluence of an ancient Mesopotamian style, which appealed to Darius because of its imperial references, with the ability to execute such a style drawn from a distant part of the empire, namely western Anatolia.

Acknowledging style as an important ingredient in meaning, we should accept that these elements would have been consciously deployed as part of Darius’ creation of an imperial image. And what would be more to the point than referencing the first great empire of the Near East, that of Akkad, through *both* content and style, while reconstituting *both* to be uniquely Achaemenid? Of course, the stylistic similarities between the body of Darius and the body of Naram-Sin could be only a coincidence, though a striking one, as would also be the fact that the stele of Naram-Sin lay at Susa, a critical locale for Darius in the early years of his reign. Yet, given the more blatant references to the Assyrian imperial tradition in hair style, beard and winged disc, it seems hardly surprising that the style of rendering

the body and clothing of the ruler would also tap into an older and prestigious tradition of conquest and expansion, befitting the overall subject of the Bisitun relief. Indeed, one might understand the Bisitun relief as providing both spatial and temporal resonance for Darius. Spatially, it drew upon the wide diversity of the conquered territories that were incorporated into his empire, a strategy used with yet more finesse at Persepolis. Temporally, the relief plumbed the great Mesopotamian tradition of empire from Neo-Babylonian times, through Assyria, back to the legendary and alluring heroes of Akkad.

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Figure 1. Bisitun Relief (after H. Luschey 1968, pl. 26; courtesy of the German Archaeological Institute)

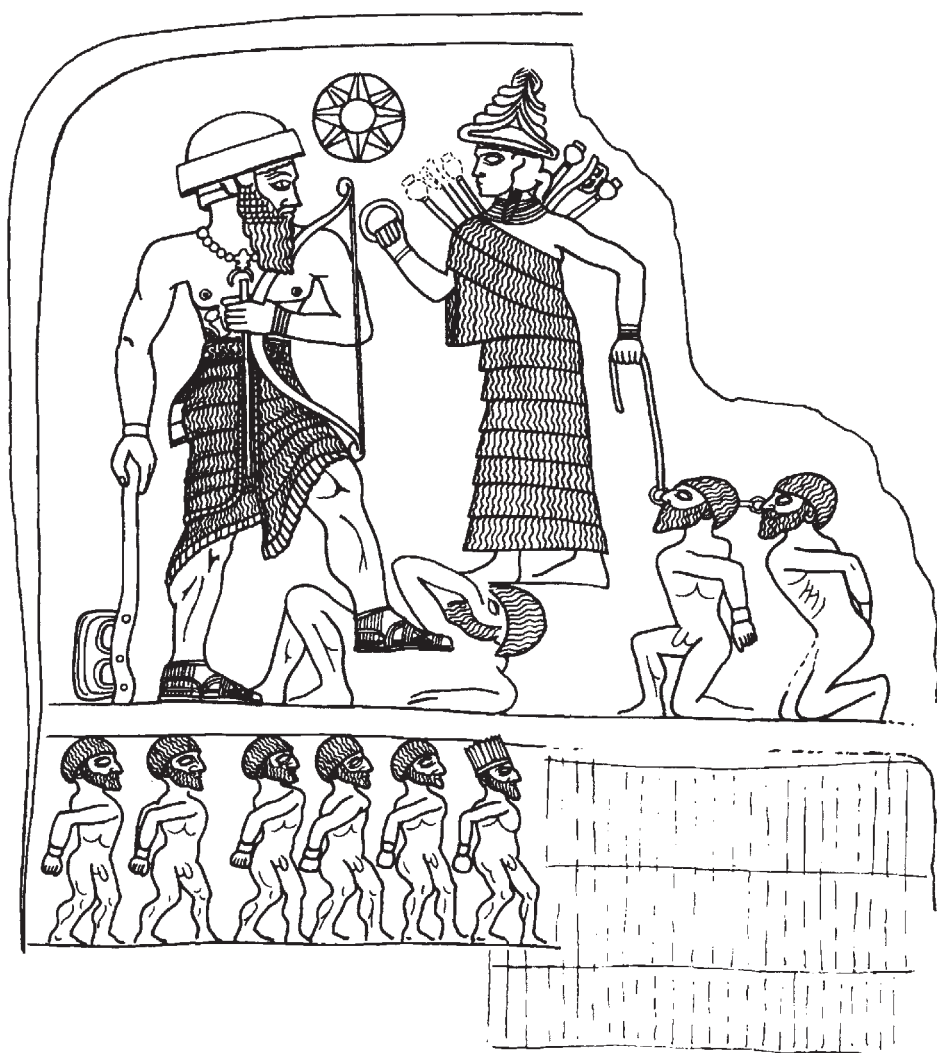


Figure 2. Drawing of Sar-i Pul relief of Annubanini (after Potts 1999, fig. 9.3; courtesy of D. T. Potts)



Figure 3. Stele of Naram-Sin, Musée du Louvre, Paris (Réunion des Musées Nationaux/ Art Resource, NY)



Figure 4. Boundary stone of Marduk-apla-iddina II, Vorderasiatisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/ Art Resource, NY)



Figure 5. Bisitun Relief, detail of Darius (after H. Luschey 1968, pl. 28; courtesy of the German Archaeological Institute)



Figure 6. Siphnian Treasury, detail of Apollo and Artemis from the Gigantomachy, Archaeological Museum, Delphi (Nimatallah/ Art Resource, NY)



Figure 7. Stele of Naram-Sin, detail of Naram-Sin, Musée du Louvre, Paris (Réunion des Musées Nationaux/ Art Resource, NY)